

Lost

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What if Delia thought that Ash had died aboard the St. Anne? Inspired by Meredith T. Tasaki's "For Those in Peril on the Sea" and contains Eldershipping.

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Chapter 1

My baby.

I stare at the video screen in disbelief. I can't believe what Officer Jenny has just told me.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Ketchum," the grim-faced Officer Jenny continues. "We searched the entire area and there are no sign of any survivors."

"But... but there must be some mistake," I stammer. "Ash and his friends are on their Pokémon training journey. They couldn't have been on that ship."

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Ketchum, but your son was among the passengers of the *St. Anne*. His name was on the ship's roster. Several of the passengers reported seeing a dark-haired boy in a baseball cap with a Pikachu matching your son's description on board shortly before the ship sank."

Oh God... My legs suddenly give way from underneath me.

"Delia!" A pair of strong arms grab me and help me onto the nearby couch.

"I'm... I'm all right, Samuel," I reassure him.

But that's a lie. My baby's dead. I'm not all right. I'll never be all right again.

"Thanks... t-t-hank you," I whisper to Officer Jenny before the tears start.

"Again, I'm so sorry, Mrs. Ketchum. You have my deepest sympathy." Officer Jenny sighed as she hung up the phone and the screen went black.

"Ash... oh, Ash." I can't stop the tears now. "My baby... my baby's dead."

A thousand images flit through my mind: Holding Ash shortly after he was born. Ash taking his first step. Ash saying "Mama" for the first time. Playing with Ash on the swings. Sending Ash off to school for the first time. Ash learning to ride his bike by himself. Ash leaving home to go on his Pokémon journey.

But Ash isn't coming back. He's never coming home again. He and his friends are lying at the bottom of the ocean.

Samuel sits down on the couch next to me and takes me into his arms. Thank God he happened to stop by at the time Officer Jenny called. I don't think I would be able to handle this alone.

But that's what I am now. I'm alone. I don't have anyone now -- no husband, no child, no relatives, no one.

I bury my face in his neck and cry. He's crying, too.

"Oh Delia," he whispers as he starts stroking my hair. "I'm so sorry."

I'm crying so hard now that I can't even speak. All I can do is hold him tight and sob uncontrollably.

My baby... my baby's gone. Gone forever.

I don't know how long I cried or what exactly happened, but I remember not being able to catch my breath then everything started slipping away. And then I sank into merciful oblivion.

To be continued...

Chapter 2

What... where am I?

Voces. I hear voices. Men's voices. They sound so far away, like they're at the other end of a tunnel.

"... had a terrible shock."

I don't exactly recognize that voice, but it's vaguely familiar.

"Is she going to be all right?"

Samuel.

"Physically, she'll be all right, but emotionally is another story. In her condition, she shouldn't be left alone right now."

"Don't worry. I'm not going to leave her."

"Give her one of these every six hours if she has difficulty sleeping tonight. I'll call later to see how she's doing."

"Thank you for coming over, Doctor."

"No problem, Professor Oak. Please give Mrs. Ketchum my condolences when she wakes up. Ash was one of my patients, too."

I hear footsteps, then the sound of someone going down the stairs. The front door opens then shuts again. Footsteps again, this time someone coming back up the stairs. The footsteps grow louder - now someone's standing next to me. He or she gently touches my hair, then spreads a blanket on top of me.

I'm in bed. How did I get here? What am I doing here? And who's with me? What's going on?

Frightened, I attempt to open my eyes. Everything's blurry at first, but slowly the white lace curtains on my bedroom window come into focus.

I'm in my room, I realize. But I'm confused as to what's going on.

"Delia?" Samuel, who's sitting in the chair next to my bed, leans over and gently takes my hand in his. "How do you feel?"

"I... what's going on?" I mumble.

Samuel bites his lip anxiously. "Delia, do you remember the phone call from Officer Jenny?"

Officer Jenny? Then I remember.

Ash.

As my eyes fill with tears again, I slowly nod.

"Ash... he's... the ship..."

"Yes," Samuel replies as he clutches my hand.

"No... oh no...." Sobbing, I roll over and bury my face in my pillow while Samuel lightly strokes my back. I cry until I can't cry anymore, then I close my eyes and sink into darkness once more.

When I awake again, the room is dark. It's nighttime.

I feel so tired, so sick. All I want to do is forget everything. To disappear into oblivion once more and stay there forever.

"Delia," a familiar voice whispers softly. "I'm here."

"Samuel," I whisper back as he reaches for my hand.

"Delia, do you feel like eating anything?" he asks as he brushes a strand of hair out of my face. "I know you probably don't, but do you think you could handle some hot tea? You'll feel a bit better if you have something in your stomach."

I slowly shake my head. I don't want to eat anything. All I want to do is die. To be with my child again.

Then I notice the bottle sitting on the table next to my bed.

"They're sedatives," Samuel explains as he notices my glance in that direction. "The doctor was here earlier."

"Doctor?"

"You fainted. I was worried about you." He lays a palm on my forehead. "You're chilled." He reaches over and pulls the bedspread on top of me.

I continue to stare at the pill bottle. And then I know a way to forget the pain. I reach over in the direction of the bottle, but Samuel picks it up out of my reach.

"Do you need one?" he asks.

"Leave the bottle, I'll manage," I reply, trying to sound as innocent as possible. "I'll take them if I need to."

Samuel gives me an odd look and then I realize that he knows exactly what I'm thinking.

"I'll leave you one," he says as he opens the bottle and places one white pill on the table. "I don't trust you with these."

I give him a dirty look.

"No, Delia," he says as he pockets the pill bottle. "I'm not going to let you kill yourself. I know that's what you feel like doing right now, but I'm not going to let you. I care about you too much."

The tears start again. "Please," I plead. "Let me die. Let me be with Ash."

"Delia, I understand your feelings, but hurting yourself won't bring Ash back."

"How can you understand how I feel?" I lash out at him.

"Because I've lost a son, too," he replies. "I know what it's like to lose your only child. And I know from my own experience that the pain is so terrible that you want to die." He pushes back the sleeve of his lab coat to reveal a two-inch long scar on his left wrist. "And I nearly did."

I stare at his wrist in disbelief. "You... you tried to kill yourself?"

"Yes," he nods as he pulls the sleeve of his lab coat back down. "The day after my son and his wife died in that car wreck, I went down to the lab, found a scalpel, and slit my wrist."

I gasp in horror. "I... I had no idea you... that you..."

"One of my lab assistants found me. You remember Spencer Hale, don't you?"

"Spencer? He was the one who found you?"

"Yes. When we got back from the emergency room, I made up some story about being careless and getting cut by a wild Sandslash. I then swore Spencer to secrecy."

"You lied about it? Why?"

"Because when I saw the blood pouring out of my arm, only then did I realize what a stupid, selfish thing I had done. And I was ashamed."

"Why?"

"Because I realized that if I did kill myself, then there would be no one to take care of May and Gary. They were my responsibility now, and I had blown it. I was so caught up in my own grief that I wasn't thinking about them. And I'm still ashamed about that, even today."

I look into his eyes and see a pain that I'd never known existed. Embarrassed, he averts his eyes.

"And now you and Spencer are the only other people in this world who know the truth about what happened that day. I never told May or Gary about what I did."

My heart aches for him, but it aches even more for Ash. "But at least you have your grandchildren," I wail. "I don't have anyone now. No husband, no child, no relatives, no one. I'm all alone now. No one will miss me if I kill myself."

"But I would," Samuel says as he reaches for my hand once more. "I would."

Oh God, this is all too much -- first Ash, then Samuel saying that he loves me. I can't deal with all this.

"Samuel, I..." I can't continue as I break down once more. It's just all too much.

To be continued...

Chapter 3

I don't know how long I slept, but when I wake again, the sun is shining brightly through the white lace curtains. A snoring sound causes me to glance over at the chair next to my bed where I find Samuel is curled up there, sound asleep.

Poor man, I think as I watch him sleep. His head is cocked to one side, his hair is sticking out in all directions, his clothes are all rumpled, and he hasn't shaved in a while.

Then again, I probably don't look much better. But at least now I don't feel quite as bad as I did before. Besides, I can't lie in bed forever - I have too many things to do.

And the first thing I'm going to do is get something to eat, I decide as my stomach growls. I can't remember the last time I ate. Carefully, I slide out of bed, not wanting to wake Samuel. But the moment I stand up, my legs won't hold me and I feel myself falling... falling...

"Delia? Delia, can you hear me?"

Slowly, I open my eyes and I see Samuel, who looks like he's ready to kill me, hovering over me.

"What... what happened?" I murmur as I realize that I'm lying on the floor.

"You got out of bed and passed out again," Samuel growls as he helps me sit up. "The *thud* you made when you hit the floor woke me up."

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to disturb you," I apologize when I see the anger in his eyes.

"Do you have any idea how frightened I was when I woke up and saw you lying there on the floor? My God, I thought you had fallen out of bed and hit your head or something." He brushes aside my hair and inspects my forehead. "Doesn't look like anything's bruised."

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry. It's just that I was so hungry, and I wanted to go downstairs and make something for us to eat."

"Next time, wake me when you want to get out of bed," he admonishes as he helps me to my feet. My legs buckle again. "Look at you. You can barely stand." He helps me back into bed. "Do you think you can handle some tea and toast?"

"I think so."

"Be back in a moment," he says as he stretches his back and heads for the door. "And don't get out of that bed again, understand?"

I nod as he disappears down the hall. I lean back on my pillow, but I don't feel like sleeping now. I'm feeling restless - I've got to get up and get moving again. I hear the phone ring downstairs, but remembering Samuel's warning, I'm not going to get up and answer it. A few minutes later, Samuel, with a tray in hand, comes back into the room.

"Here," he says as he places the tray on my lap. "Go easy at first. You'll get sick if you eat too much too fast."

I pick up the cup of hot tea and take a sip. As soon as I swallow I can feel the energy flowing back into my body. "Who was that on the phone while you were downstairs?"

"Officer Jenny again. She said that they were planning a memorial service for the families tomorrow."

The realization hits me that there's not only Ash to consider. Other people lost their children, brothers, and sisters, too. "Those poor people. Their families must be devastated. I know that Ash

mentioned that Misty had three older sisters, but he never said anything about her parents. And he told me that Brock had ten little brothers and sisters - those poor children. Did Officer Jenny say anything about the other two people that were on the ship with Ash and his friends?"

"Only that their names were Jessie and James and that they were members of Team Rocket. Delia, speaking of families, don't you think you should get in touch with... Ash's father?"

I drop my toast. "No! I can't do that!"

"Delia, I don't know what happened between you and Ash's father, but don't you think he has a right to know about what happened to his son?"

I shake my head violently. "No, Samuel. No. I can't do that."

"Why not?"

"Because... because Ash's father doesn't know that he has a son."

Samuel stares at me in confusion. "Delia, I don't understand. You told me once that Ash's father was on a Pokémon training journey."

I take a deep breath and look him in the eye. "Samuel, since you trusted me enough to share your secret with me, I'm going to share my secret with you. Ash's father... he's not a Pokémon trainer."

"He's not?"

"No. I just made up that story."

"Why?"

"Because... because I didn't want anyone, especially Ash, to know the truth."

"Why not?"

"When I was younger, I got into quite a bit of trouble. I fell in love with an older man who I later learned wasn't all he said he was. When I discovered that he was doing some things - some pretty bad things - I decided to leave him."

"That must've taken a lot of courage to leave someone like that."

"But after I left him, I discovered that I was pregnant with his child. Since he - Ash's father - is a very powerful man, I was afraid that he might come after me and take Ash away. So when I came back here to Pallet Town, I made up a story that I had been briefly married, but Ash's father had decided to go away on a Pokémon training journey. When Ash got older, I told him the same story. I didn't want him to know the truth about his real father."

Samuel reaches for my hand. "Delia, who is Ash's father? I won't tell anyone, I promise."

"Ash's father is the head of Team Rocket. His name is Giovanni."

Samuel's eyebrows shoot up in surprise. "You... you were involved with Team Rocket?"

I lower my head in shame. "Yes. But Giovanni told me that it was just the 'family business'. I can't believe how naïve I was. When I learned what he was really up to, that's when I left him. But now... at least now I don't have to worry about Giovanni taking Ash away from me ever again."

"Oh, Delia," Samuel says as he squeezes my hand comfortingly.

"I'm... I'm okay, Samuel," I say as I push aside the tray. "I've done enough crying for a while. Right now, I've got to get up and get things ready for the service tomorrow. Besides, you need to go home and take care of your Pokémon."

"Don't worry about that. My research assistants are taking care of them. I'm going to stay here as long as you need me to."

I reach over and touch his unshaven cheek. "Thank you, Samuel." I move over in the bed. "Why don't you lie down and get some sleep while I take a shower? Your back must be killing you from sleeping in that chair."

"Delia, are you sure you can get up by yourself?" He hovers close to me as I stand up.

"Yes, I'm sure. The food helped a lot." I give him a gentle push towards the bed. "Get some sleep."

I go into the bathroom and look at myself in the mirror. I look horrible. Red, puffy eyes, my makeup is smeared all over my face, and my hair is flying in all different directions.

"Pull yourself together, Delia," I tell my reflection in the mirror. "Ash would be pretty horrified if he saw you now." I catch a glance of Samuel, who has already fallen asleep on the bed, and, strangely, feel a renewed sense of purpose.

Despite everything, life must go on. And rather than stop living, at least now I feel as if I do have a reason to go on.

To be continued...

Chapter 4

After my shower, I head downstairs. I deliberately avoid Ash's room. I'm not ready for that. I don't know if I'll ever be able to go into my son's room again. But right now, I can't think about that.

Downstairs, there are bouquets of flowers at the door, dishes of food from neighbors and friends sitting on the kitchen table, sympathy cards lying on the coffee table. I find a sheet of paper and begin making a list of all the people who have sent me something so that I can mail thank-you notes later. After I complete my list, I notice that the kitchen is filthy. Samuel, in his attempt to make breakfast, has left dirty dishes piled in the sink, crumbs all over the counter, and there are food stains on the floor. I put on an apron, grab a mop, and throw myself into my housework. I enjoy cleaning the house - it gives me a sense of accomplishment and today, it keeps me from thinking about everything that's happened.

Or at least until I find one of Ash's toy Pokémon hidden in one of the cushions on the couch. Then I lose it again. Clutching the little plastic Kangaskhan in my hand, I start sobbing. Samuel, who by now has awakened from his nap, comes downstairs a couple of minutes later and finds me weeping on the couch.

"Oh, Delia," he says sympathetically as he sits down on the couch next to me and takes me into his arms.

I unclench my fist and show him the toy. "Look. A mama and her baby." Then I start crying uncontrollably once more.

Still clutching the plastic toy, I awake an hour later to the smell of something cooking -- it smells like lasagna or spaghetti. I open my eyes and see Samuel sitting at the kitchen table in the middle of eating something. Rubbing my itchy eyes, I slowly get up from the

couch. I slip the figurine of the mother Pokémon and her child in my pocket and wander into the kitchen.

"How do you feel?" Samuel asks as he offers me a forkful of his lasagna. "Mrs. Farmington brought it over while you were asleep. It's still warm."

I take a bite and realize that I haven't really had much of anything to eat since this morning. "Pretty good. I'll have to send her a thank-you note." I move aside some of the other dishes crowding the table and sit down. "There's so much food here that I don't know what I'm going to do with it all."

Samuel scoops out a portion of the lasagna and hands me a plateful. "That's because everyone in Pallet Town cares about you, Delia. Just like I do."

"Thank you," I reply as I take the plate of food from him. "And thank you for everything. I'm sorry to be such a burden. I've taken you away from your lab, your research."

"Don't ever think that, Delia," Samuel assures me as he leans over and reaches for my hand. "Don't ever be afraid to ask me for help. I'll always be here for you."

"Thank you," I reply, overcome by emotion. "I don't know what I would've done if you hadn't been here."

"That's what I'm here for," Samuel says as he squeezes my hand. "Now why don't you have something to eat? Your food's getting cold."

The food gives me new strength - the strength I need to start getting my life back into order.

"Thanks for helping me with the dishes, Samuel," I tell him after dinner as I take off my apron and toss it on the back of one of the

kitchen chairs. "I think everything's under control now... including me. Why don't you go home now? I'm sure your Pokémon miss you."

"Delia, are you sure? Like I said, I'll stay here with you as long as you need me."

"I know. But I think I'll be all right now."

"I don't know, Delia. Do you think you'll be all right by yourself tonight?"

"I think so. Besides, you need to get back to your place. I'm sure you must be eager to get cleaned up and shave."

"Well, if you're sure," he says reluctantly as he heads for the front door.

"I'll be okay," I assure him as I open the door.

"I'll call you later to see how you're doing," he says as he gently touches my cheek. "And don't hesitate to call me - no matter what the time - if you need anything."

"Thank you," I reply as I step back into the house and shut the door.

Ever since Ash left on his Pokémon journey a couple of months ago, it's taken me a while to get used to having a quiet house. At first, the silence nearly drove me mad, but since then I've started to embrace my solitude and even enjoy it.

Until now. Now the silence is depressing. Just knowing that this house is going to stay quiet forever - to never hear Ash scrambling down the stairs once more, to never hear him tear through the house shouting at the top of his lungs...

I've got to get my mind off of this. If I don't, I'm going to go mad. I turn on the TV and for a while I lose myself in a program - until a commercial with a mother taking care of her son's scraped knee comes on.

The tears start again. "Oh, Ash..."

I jump up and shut off the TV. I can't take this.

Just then, a knock at the door makes me jump. Figuring it's another neighbor stopping by with flowers or food, I quickly wipe my eyes and try to make myself presentable as I open the door.

"Samuel? What are you doing back here?" I exclaim at the sight of my now cleaned-up and shaven next-door neighbor.

"Delia, I've been thinking about it, and I don't think you should be alone tonight," he says as he notices my bloodshot eyes. "After what happened this morning, I don't want to take any chances."

"Samuel, the only reason I passed out this morning was because I hadn't eaten anything. I'm okay now."

"Still, it would make me feel better knowing for sure that you were all right. But you're not, are you?"

I shake my head. Secretly, I'm grateful that he came back. "It's just... it's too quiet."

"I'll sleep down here on the couch," he says as he unfolds the quilt on the back of the sofa.

"Oh no, not with your bad back. There's an extra bed in Ash's..." I cover my mouth with my hand. I still can't get used to the idea that my son is never coming home again.

"Like I said, I'll sleep on the couch. If you need anything - anything at all - come wake me up, all right?"

"Samuel, I appreciate this, but you really don't have to..."

"I *want* to do this, Delia." He fluffs one of the throw pillows. "There. That should make a comfortable bed. Now why don't you try to get some sleep? You need to get some rest."

"Seems as if all I've done is sleep the last twenty-four hours. I'm not sure I'll be able to."

"Do you need one of those sedatives?" He reaches into his pocket. "I still have the bottle if you need one."

I reach for the bottle to read the label, but he pulls it out of my reach. Then I realize that he still thinks I'm going to try to kill myself.

"Samuel, if the reason you came over is because you think that I'm still going to try to kill myself, let me assure you that I'm not."

I can tell he doesn't exactly believe me, but he reluctantly hands me the bottle. I read the label and give him back the container of pills. "I'll see if I can get by without these tonight."

"Remember, if you need me for anything at all, don't hesitate to come down here and wake me, all right?"

"Thanks. Well, guess I'd better head upstairs."

For a moment we look at each other awkwardly. I think he wants to kiss me. But I'm not ready for that yet. My heart hurts too much from losing my son that I'm not ready to love anything or anyone else right now.

Sensing my reluctance, he backs off. "Good night, then."

"Good night," I call back as I head up the stairs.

I avoid even looking in the direction of Ash's room as I head down the hallway to my room and get ready for bed. For an hour I lie in bed with the light on. I don't want to turn out the light. The darkness makes me think of the ocean - the dark ocean where my son and his friends now lie. But I can't sleep with the light on, either. After tossing about for another half-hour, I decide to opt for one of the sedatives. If nothing else, at least it'll make me forget about everything for a while. I slip on a robe and silently creep downstairs. I hate the

thought of waking Samuel up, but it turns out that I don't have to worry. He's lying on the couch, reading a book. The creak of my foot on the step causes him to look up from his reading.

"Delia. Are you all right?"

"I couldn't sleep," I admit as I sit down in the chair next to the couch.
"I thought I'd try one of the sleeping pills."

He digs the pill bottle out of his pocket, opens it, and hands me one. I get a glass of water from the kitchen and swallow the pill.

"That should start working in a little while," he says as I come back into the living room and return to my chair. "Would you like for me to stay with you until you fall asleep? Just to make sure you don't have some kind of reaction to the pill," he adds quickly.

I really don't want to be alone tonight. I nod and the two of us head upstairs to my room. I curl back up on the bed and he sits down in the chair next to me. For a moment, we say nothing. We just look at each other.

"Samuel, could you... could you just hold me for a little while?" Right now more than anything, I just want someone to hold me, to comfort me, to make me feel like I'm not alone.

"Certainly." I scoot over to make room for him on the bed. He lies down next to me and wraps his arm around my waist. I close my eyes and snuggle against him. And then I wonder...

"Do you think Ash had someone to hold him like this?"

"Hmm?"

"Do you think Ash had someone to hold him like this? Do you think he was scared when... when...?"

"Ash was with his friends," Samuel reassures me as he reaches up and begins to slowly stroke my hair. "I think he had some comfort in

that."

"I wish... I wish I could've been there with him. Sometimes I wish that I had never let him go on his Pokémon journey."

"Delia, more than anything Ash wanted to be a Pokémon trainer. You had to let him go."

"But... but if I hadn't, then maybe... maybe..." The tears start again.

"Delia, you can't blame yourself for what happened to Ash. It's not your fault. If anything, you should blame me for giving Ash his first Pokémon and sending him off on his journey in the first place."

I roll over to face him. "It's not your fault, Samuel. I guess Ash would've gone off to be a Pokémon trainer no matter what either one of us did."

"That's right, Delia. So you can't blame yourself for what happened."

My eyelids start to feel heavy and I yawn. "The pill must be starting to work." I close my eyes and settle back on my pillow.

"That's it, Delia. Just relax now," Samuel whispers as he continues to stroke my head. "I'll stay right here with you."

A wave of dizziness overtakes me and I let myself be swept away by it. I move closer to him and the last thing I remember before I drift off into slumber is a soft kiss on my cheek.

To be continued...

Chapter 5

The next morning, the two of us are standing side by side on a small ship that will soon be heading out into the ocean. We're not the only passengers on board. There are three weeping teenage girls - Misty's older sisters, Brock's ten younger brothers and sisters and their father, and... oh no...

A tall, expensively-dressed, dark-haired man steps out of the limo that has just pulled up to the dock.

"Giovanni," I whisper as I move closer to Samuel.

"I hope this nonsense doesn't take too long," Giovanni snaps at his driver. "I have to be back at the gym by one." Scowling, he slams the car door and he and his Persian stride up the gangplank to the boat.

Samuel notices my fear. "What's wrong, Delia?"

"Giovanni," I stammer. "I didn't think he'd be here."

"But two of the passengers were Team Rocket members," Samuel reminds me.

"Yes, they were," answers the head of Team Rocket as he comes toward us. "And even though they were by far the most incompetent members of Team Rocket, they were still Team Rocket members nonetheless." Realizing whom he's talking to, Giovanni stares at me for a moment and then smiles in recognition. "Hello, Delia. It's been a while."

"Giovanni," I nod, trying not to look at my former lover.

"Why are you here?" he asks, intrigued at my presence.

"My son," I reply shakily as I feel the tears coming on. "He was one of the passengers."

"My condolences," Giovanni replies, although I can tell from the tone of his voice that he's just saying it to be polite. He's not really interested in what happened to Ash. Impatiently, he looks at his watch and frowns. "I hope this doesn't take too long."

That's it. I can't contain my anger any longer. "You don't care, do you, Giovanni?!" Surprised, Giovanni looks up from his watch. "Damn it, Giovanni, at least have the decency to mourn for your son!"

Giovanni stares at me in horror. "What... what did you just say?"

"Ash was *your* son, Giovanni! Yours and mine! I was pregnant with him when I left you and Team Rocket!"

The color drains from Giovanni's face. "You... you were...?"

"Yes, Giovanni, it's true," Samuel replies as he places his arm around my waist.

"Why?" Giovanni asks as he stares at me with stricken eyes. "Why didn't you tell me, Delia?"

"Because I wanted to leave everything that had to do with Team Rocket behind when I left you. I never told Ash that you were his father. And I was afraid that if you found out the truth, you would come after me and take Ash away."

"And now he's been taken away from both of us for good, hasn't he?" Giovanni replies contemptuously. Angrily, he motions to his Persian and the two retreat to the far side of the deck.

"Are you all right, Delia?" Samuel asks as he helps me into a nearby deck chair. I'm shaking so much that I can barely stand.

"I'll be all right, Samuel," I smile slightly as the boat begins to move.

A half-hour later, the boat comes to a stop over the final resting place of the St. Anne and its remaining passengers.

"Goodbye, Misty," Daisy, the oldest Waterflower sister, sobs as she tosses a pink rose into the sea. Her other sisters, Violet and Lily, do the same.

Brock's father says nothing, but tosses what appears to be a Boulder Badge into the water. The younger brothers and sisters of the deceased boy, some of whom are too young to understand what's going on, fling a variety of items into the ocean - a bunch of hand-picked wildflowers, a handful of brightly-colored rocks, a small stuffed teddy bear, a book, a drawing, and various other personal items that remind them of their brother.

I hold my breath as Giovanni approaches the rail. He removes a flower from a memorial wreath of red roses shaped like the letter "R".

"A small token of gratitude for having died in the service of Team Rocket," Giovanni says grudgingly as he drops the wreath overboard. Then I watch curiously as he studies the single rose in his hand. "Addio, il mio figlio," he says softly as he drops the final rose over the side of the railing. With a last glance in my direction, he returns to his place on the other side of the deck.

And now it's my turn to say goodbye. Slowly, I approach the railing.

"Bye, baby," I say as I let go of the mass of red and white roses that are shaped like a Poké ball - Samuel's idea. In the center of the bouquet is a small yellow rose for Pikachu. "Sleep well, sweetie. I'll see you again someday soon." I start to sing the lullaby I used to sing Ash when he was a baby.

"Hush, little baby, and don't you cry... Mommy's gonna buy you all the pretty Ponyta..."

I can't continue. I'm too choked up from the lump forming in my throat. Blinded by the tears welling up in my eyes, I stumble back to my place on the deck. Samuel takes me in his arms and holds me tight while my sobs join those of the other passengers on board.

To be continued...

Chapter 6

After we disembark, Giovanni hurries into his waiting limo. He gives me a despising glance before he slams the car door and the limo pulls away. But I'm not afraid of him. I'm not afraid of him anymore because I know he can't take Ash away from me now.

We join the other passengers in the ship's terminal and prepare to head back to our lives without our loved ones. One of the Slate children, a boy of about six, comes up to me and hands me a flower he has just picked from the nearby window box.

"Here. You look sad," the little boy says as he offers me the bright red geranium. "Don't be sad."

I look down at the dark-haired boy with the eager smile, and I'm reminded of Ash once more.

"Thank you," I reply as I kneel down and give him a hug, trying to stifle my tears.

"Why are you crying?" the boy asks as he returns my hug.

"Because you remind me of my little boy," I answer.

"Where is he?" the child asks as he looks around the room.

"He... he's in heaven," I say as I try hard not to break down. I don't want to upset the child.

"My mommy's in heaven, too," says the boy as his smile fades. "You kind of look like her. I miss her."

"We all miss her, Tommy," says the boy's father as he comes up behind his son. "And Brock."

"Don't worry, Daddy," says the oldest Slate daughter, a girl of about eleven, as she takes her father's hand. "I'll take care of all of us now, just like Mommy and Brock used to."

The screeching of tires and the roar of an engine causes us to look outside as Officer Jenny comes racing up on her motorcycle. "Thank goodness I caught you all before you left!" she says breathlessly as she screeches to a stop in front of the terminal.

"Giovanni already left," Samuel informs her.

"I'll contact him later," Officer Jenny says as she climbs off of her motorcycle.

"What's going on?" asks one of the Waterflower sisters.

"Everyone, I have some amazing news," Officer Jenny says as she holds up a piece of paper. "The people that were thought to be trapped aboard the *St. Anne* have been found alive. Your loved ones are safe."

The Waterflower sisters and the Slate siblings shriek in excitement.

My legs start to shake. I'm numb with shock and disbelief. Ash is alive?

Samuel grips my hand tightly.

"How do you know for sure they're okay?" asks Brock's father, who, like the rest of us, is stunned by Officer Jenny's news.

"See for yourself," Officer Jenny grins as she picks up the receiver of the nearby videophone and starts pressing the numerical buttons on the console. A moment later, a red-haired girl appears on the screen.

"Misty!" the Waterflower sisters shriek as they crowd around the console.

"Daisy, Violet, Lily... what's going on?" the confused girl asks.

"Oh, Misty... we thought you were, like, dead," Violet informs her in a voice choked with emotion.

"Yeah, we thought we would, like, never see you again," Lily says as tears start to roll down her cheeks.

"Are you okay, little sister?" asks Daisy, who's also overcome with emotion.

"I'm fine," says Misty. "We're all..." Suddenly, a tanned teenage boy with spiky dark hair appears next to the girl.

"What's going on, Misty?" the boy asks her.

"Brock!!!" squeal the Slate siblings as they push aside the Waterflower sisters and start talking all at once.

"Oh Brock, you're okay!"

"Were you scared down in the ocean?"

"Was it dark?"

"Did you see any sharks?"

"Did you use your Pokémons to get out of the ship?"

"Brock, we missed you!"

"Have you caught any new Pokémons yet?"

"Did you see the flowers we threw in the water for you?"

"Daddy said you were in Heaven with Mommy - how'd you get back so fast?"

Brock's father pushes to the front of the crowd. "Are you all right, son?"

"Yeah, Dad. I'm fine. How's everybody else doing?"

"We're all just fine now that we know that you're okay," Flint smiles as he reaches up and grabs his youngest daughter, a two-year old toddler, who's climbing atop the console to get to her brother.

"Hey, looks like a party's going on there!" says a familiar voice.

It's my baby!

I give an involuntary cry as my child's face appears on the screen.

My baby's alive! My baby's okay!

"Ash!"

I race to the console and push aside everyone. I want to see my baby. I want to make sure he's okay - that this isn't a dream or some kind of cruel prank.

"Hi, Mom. What's going on?" Ash asks in his usual nonchalant tone.

Yes, it's really Ash.

His smile quickly disappears when he sees the tears of joy in my eyes. "Are you okay, Mom?"

"Ash, we've all been worried sick about you," I reply once I swallow the lump in my throat. "You and your friends."

"Gosh, we didn't mean to worry anyone. We didn't realize that you guys knew about the ship sinking," Ash answers with concern. "But don't worry, Mom. We're all okay. Thanks to our Pokémons."

"Pika-pi!" agrees Pikachu as he hops on Ash's shoulder.

"Looks like Pikachu's doing well," Samuel says as he comes up behind me. "Are both you and Pikachu all right?"

"Hi, Professor Oak. Yeah, we're fine," replies Ash with a smile as he tickles Pikachu's chin.

"Ash, hurry up!" says Misty offscreen.

"I've gotta go now, Mom. If we don't catch the ferry to the mainland, there won't be another one until tomorrow," Ash explains as he gathers up his backpack.

Part of me wants to tell Ash to stay put where he is, and I'll come and get him. I don't want to let my baby out of my sight ever again.

But I know that's not being realistic. All his life, Ash has wanted to become a Pokémon trainer. And I know that I have to let him go follow his dream.

"Ash, be sure to give us a call when you get to the next city, all right?" Samuel says. He knows exactly what I'm thinking.

"I will, Professor," Ash nods.

"Ash, come on!" yells Brock. "The ferry's getting ready to leave!"

"Gotta go! Bye, everyone!" The screen goes black.

I continue to stare at the screen as the Waterflower sisters hug each other tightly.

"I'll never ever be mean to Misty again!" says Lily.

"And I won't call her 'Squirtle' anymore!" resolves Violet.

"Let's go back to Cerulean City and have a big celebration!" Daisy smiles.

"And we'd better be getting back to Pewter City," Flint smiles as he places his toddler daughter atop his shoulders. "It's about time for your nap, Katie."

"And I think we should head back to Pallet Town, don't you?" Samuel smiles as he reaches for my hand.

"Let's go home."

"I don't know what I'm going to do with all this food and all these flowers," I wonder as soon as I open the back door and see the dishes of food completely covering my kitchen table. "There's more here than I'll ever be able to eat." I reach for the apron hanging on the back of one of the chairs and put it on. "Here." I hand Samuel several containers of food. "You take some of this home. You and your assistants can eat this. That way it won't go to waste. I hate throwing out food."

"Thanks, Delia," Samuel says as he tries to juggle the stack of plastic containers and casserole dishes in his arms. "That's very generous of you."

"And I'll take these flowers to the hospital so all the sick people can enjoy them." I start gathering up the bouquets.

"Delia, do you need any help with those?" Samuel asks.

"No. I can manage," I reassure him. "I'll be okay now."

And then I realize that there's one more thing that I haven't done.

"Samuel, I want to thank you for being here for me the last couple of days. I don't think I would've made it through everything that's happened if it hadn't been for you."

"I'll always be here for you, Delia. No matter what."

I lean over and kiss him on the cheek. "Thanks for being my friend."

As he leaves, I grab a broom and start sweeping. Despite everything that's happened the last couple of days, life must go on.

THE END

Author's note: In Meredith T. Tasaki's story, "For Those In Peril On The Sea" (which deals with Officer Jenny's POV on the sinking of the St. Anne), the author mentions that she would like to see a story on Delia's POV for the same event. "Lost" was thus written as a response to that irresistible challenge. And yes, there will soon be a story based on Samuel's POV.